# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

# Enjoying Virginia's Natural Resources

by Governor George Allen

## Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

*Each month* Virginia Wildlife *provides timely information to our constituents. In this space, we inform you of our accomplishments and how we carry out the mission of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This month it is our distinct privilege to provide you this message from Governor Allen.*

*William L. Woodfin, Jr.*
*-Director*

With hunting season upon us, Virginia's wildlife and abundant natural resources provide great opportunities for enjoying the outdoors. Sportsmen—hunters, fishermen and other men and women who are members of the sporting community—appreciate the value and virtue of healthy resources. We believe this out of an understanding gained only through experience—not because an article, politician, or government bureaucrat declared it as truth.

Virginia's sportsmen are some of the most dedicated stewards of wildlife and wildlife habitats. We have a special view of the value and dynamic nature of Virginia's wildlife. Since 1988, Virginia has re-opened 96 miles of stream-spawning habitat for shad, herring and striped bass. Deer and wild turkey are now far more abundant than they have been at any point in the last four decades. These results are in large part due to the work of private associations like hunt clubs and nonprofit organizations, in conjunction with Virginia's own fine Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities have been favorite pastimes for generations of Virginians. The Commonwealth is fortunate to have some of the best forests, waterways and beaches in the country. It is our responsibility to ensure that future generations of Virginians are able to share in the outdoor adventures our forefathers experienced even while we ourselves are enjoying them.

Hunters, fishermen and others who enjoy the great Virginia outdoors must work together to ensure that our children can also hunt, fish, swim and explore. Throughout the history of the Commonwealth, this has been the case—those who utilize and experience the environment and its wildlife are the ones who take the initiative to preserve and enhance them. Solutions to environmental challenges come when each of us takes an active part in our own communities and wildlife areas to guarantee that future generations of Virginians can appreciate all our natural resources.

So, have a great and safe time. Take advantage of Virginia's fine hunting this season and the unique natural beauty and bounty of our great Commonwealth throughout the year.

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: *Photo by ©Dwight Dyke*

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*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*

# A Powerful

# Wetland

*Sending power to four states, Virginia's Clover Power Station provides a wetland oasis for a variety of waterfowl.*

by Pat Keyser

After winding through miles of back roads that crisscross cornfields, tobacco patches and rolling green pastures where the greatest hub of human activity is a quiet country store, you're just not looking for anything too modern, too technological. But there, above oaks barely stirred by a lazy breeze, are two 444 foot tall towers! From the next ridge you see that these chimneys are connected to a large sprawling complex.

Located just outside the quiet southside town of Clover (population 215), on a bluff overlooking the Staunton River, is the recently completed Clover Power Station. Construction began on Virginia's newest electric power generating facility in 1992. Four years later, the two-unit 848 megawatt coal-fired station was sending electricity across four states.

As you adjust to the sight of one of the largest capital investments in the history of Virginia, another surprise awaits you. On 419 acres of floodplains located immediately below the plant is the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Open Space Easement. Life in the easement is as different from the 24-hour-a-day bustle of generating power, as the plant is from the surrounding countryside.

Stretched along almost three miles of the Staunton River, the easement area has been developed into a maze of wetlands and hardwood forests. In nearly 160 acres of man-made wetlands there are 14 different impoundments. And just for good measure, an enterprising colony of beavers has made their contribution by building about 25 acres of "natural" wetlands. Another 50 acres has been planted back to bottomland oaks to begin restoring the native floodplain forests. All together these represent Virginia's largest complex of managed wetlands west of Tidewater.

While deer, turkey, owls, and perhaps an occasional black bear may do well in this area, the real winners could turn out to be the dozens of species of waterbirds native to Virginia. Blue-winged teal, gadwall, widgeon, wood ducks, black ducks, mallards, and ringnecks could all become common visitors. Also benefitting from the habitat will be great blue herons, green-backed herons, American egrets, and kingfishers. You might even see ospreys in the area or even an occasional wintering bald eagle.

Perhaps one of the least obvious but most amazing visitors are the shorebirds, such as the greater and lesser yellow legs and solitary sandpipers. They will visit the wetlands mainly during spring migration. It's critical for these birds to have high quality feeding areas as they work

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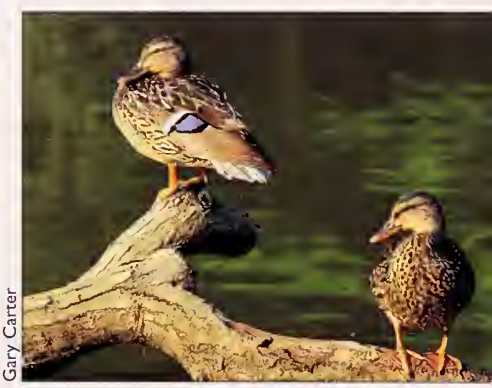


Gary Carter

***(Left)** Only a few hundred yards below the new state-of-the-art Clover Power Station is a lush wetland. **(Small photos left to right)** Egrets (photo by Allen Hearne) are among the many regular visitors to these wetlands. Flashboard risers will be used to control water levels in order to produce an abundance of waterfowl plants such as smartweed (pink) and Spanish needle (yellow). Precise control of water levels also enables creation of a good mix of open water and wetland vegetation important for waterbirds. The shallowest areas in the wetlands have a great variety of vegetation including the extremely important duck food, wild millet (foreground). Ducks like the blue-winged teal will benefit from these areas.*

their way back north and prepare for nesting. This is especially important when you consider their tiny size—about 80 grams—and their incredible migration from southern South America to the Arctic!

*(Top left) The serenity of Clover's wetlands are a remarkable testament to the ability of nature to thrive next door to the 24-hour-a-day generation of 848 megawatts of electricity. (Above) Virginia Power employee, Bill Bolin (right), discusses placement of wood duck boxes on the project area with Pat Keyser, VDGIF biologist.*
*(Above left) Cooperators plan for the completion of the first of two wildlife observation towers overlooking the wetlands. Photos by ©Dwight Dyke.*
*(Opposite page) The Clover wetlands are strategically located along the banks of the Staunton River, a key waterfowl flyway. Graphics by Pels.*

It certainly helps these tiny birds that the Clover wetlands are strategically located along the Staunton River. This river, like many others, serves as a flyway for migrating waterbirds. Many ducks travelling from nesting areas in the Great Lakes and eastern Canadian prairies use this flyway as they wing toward the Atlantic coast. At Clover these weary travelers can find an abundance of high quality feeding and resting habitat.

One of the purposes of having so many different wetland impoundments at Clover is to ensure a high diversity of habitats can be created This diversity can include areas best suited to fall migrating ducks, spring migrating shorebirds or breeding herons and egrets.

This is accomplished in part by the design of the impoundments. Each is laid off to ensure that no more than about 18" of water is in the impoundment at full pool. This in turn allows for fairly precise control of water levels. The timing, depth and duration of flooding has a great deal of influence over what type of wetland habitat develops.

To further ensure proper control of flooding, each impoundment has its own flashboard riser, a water-level control device which will enable flooding and dewatering of the site as needed. Normally, water is pulled off an area slowly over a period of several weeks in early summer. Later, toward the end of the growing season, the impoundment is gradually reflooded Every few years the soil in the unit will be disced during the drawdown to help stimulate vegetation valuable to waterfowl. This whole process, known as "moist-soil management," mimics natural wetland cycles and thus provides an abundance of native foods.

The planting of thousands of oak seedlings and construction of the numerous levees that created the wetland areas was no accident. Rather, it was the result of several years of planning, designing and most of all cooperating. What has taken place at Clover is certainly impressive for wildlife. But it may be even more impressive when you consider all of the partners that came together to make an idea into a reality.

In the mid '80s Old Dominion Electric Cooperative and Virginia Power began planning for a new power plant. As the process moved

on, the idea of donating the floodplain areas that were acquired as a part of the plant site took shape. Soon the Game Department and Ducks Unlimited became a part of the picture. Together these four partners contributed 25 percent each to the cost of constructing the wetlands. Later, as plans for a historical park at the site were explored, the Department of Conservation and Recreation became involved. Clearances were obtained from the Corps of Engineers and the State Historic Preservation Office before construction began in 1995. Work should be completed in 1996.

An additional partner became involved this summer that should make what is available to the ducks and sandpipers available for everyone to enjoy. Landmark Volunteers, a group that gives outstanding high school students summer service opportunities, came on site and helped construct a 20-foot tall observation tower overlooking the wetlands. Local citizens helped the 12 students out during the two weeks in Halifax by providing housing, leadership and a home away from home.

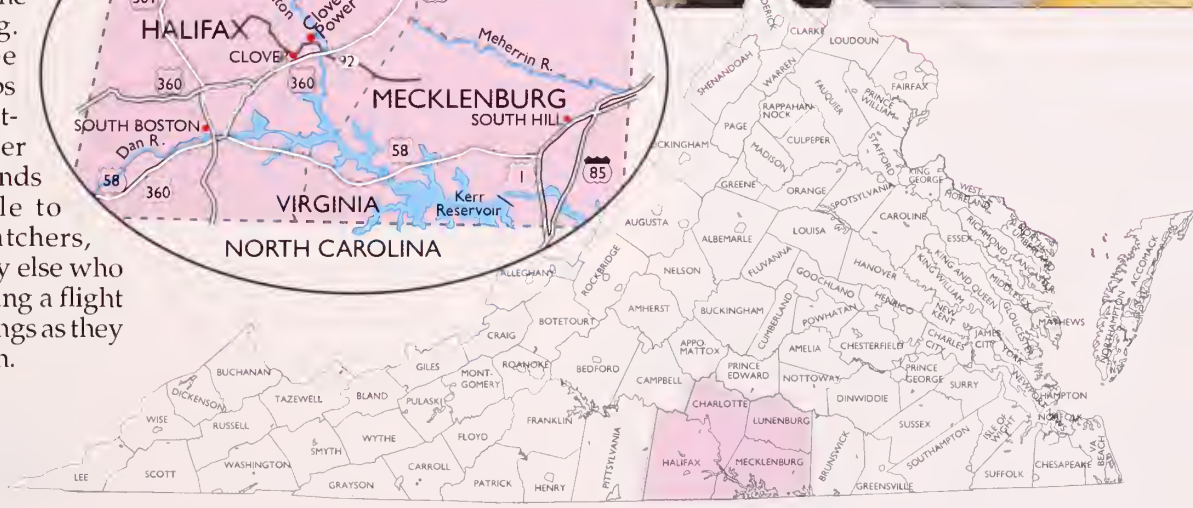
The tower is accessed by a nature trail built by yet another new partner: the Virginia Army National Guard. As a part of the Virginian's for Virginia program, these soldiers came on site and built part of the ¾-mile long nature trail. Plans are already underway to build a second observation tower along the trail next summer.

Although this project is just now taking shape, the possibilities are exciting. These wetlands may be home to hundreds perhaps even thousands of migrating waterfowl and other waterbirds. These wetlands will also, be accessible to school groups, bird-watchers, duck-lovers, and anybody else who knows the thrill of watching a flight of ducks cupping their wings as they settle into a autumn marsh.

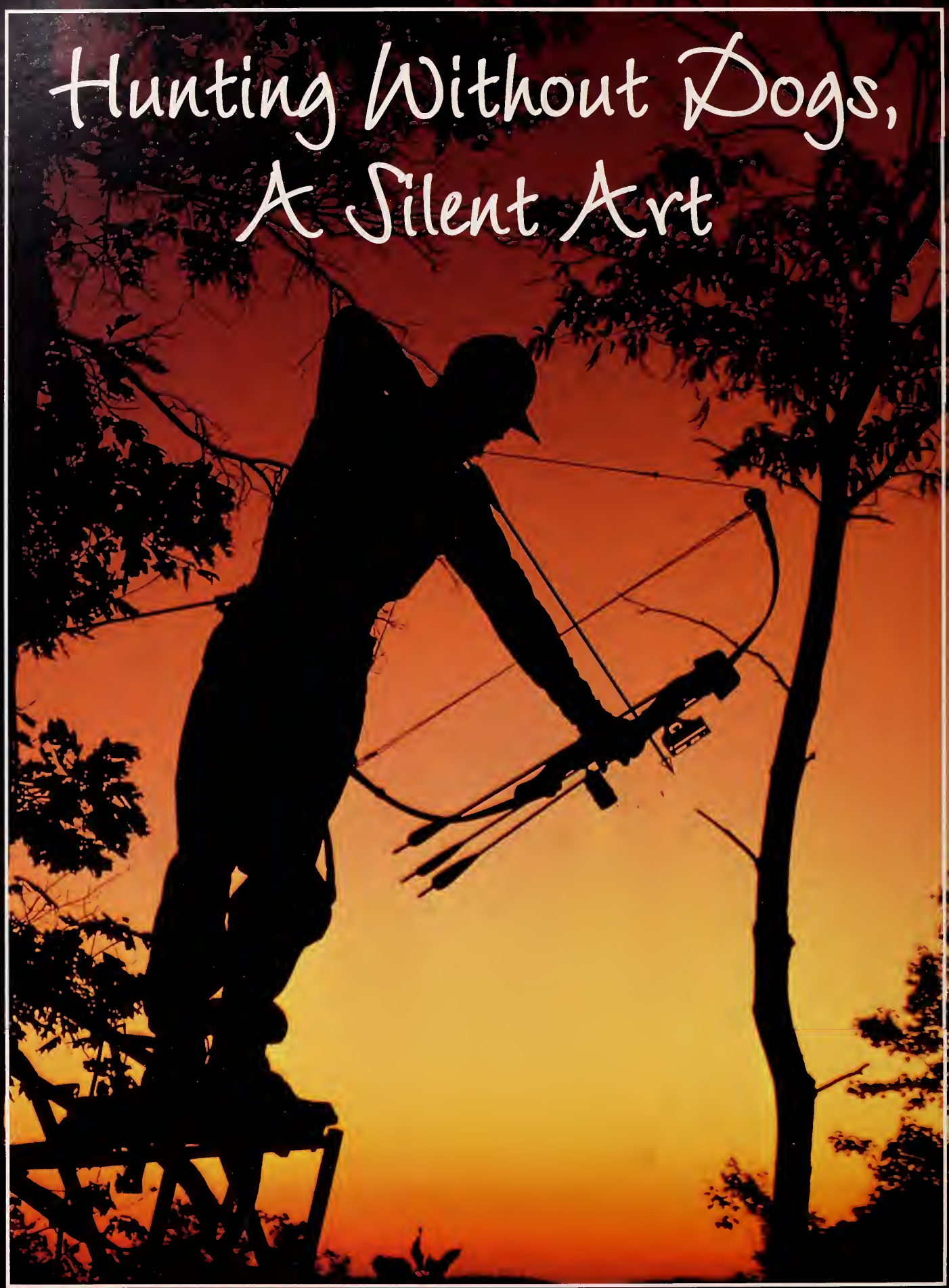
And all of this almost literally in the shadows of two massive steam turbines spinning at an astounding 3600 rpms! If burning 314 tons of coal per hour, 24 hours a day to spin these turbines doesn't seem to fit with a bald eagle chasing ducks across a marsh, you just haven't been to Clover. □

*Pat Keyser is a wildlife biologist with the Department's Wildlife Division. He works out of the Farmville Field Office.*

Maslowski Photo



# Hunting Without Dogs, A Silent Art



by Bob Gooch

On a wall in the drawing room of Ashlawn, the Albemarle County home of James Monroe the fifth President of the United States, is a mural of a red deer being chased by hounds.

That says several things to the modern deer hunter. It points out, for example, that the rich eastern Virginia tradition of hunting deer with hounds goes back a long time; not just to the early days of this country, but even to the Old World where chasing red deer with hounds was very popular with the landed gentry. It also says that when the early president wrote his famous Monroe Doctrine declaring American independence of European influence he made an exception for hunting deer with hounds.

Obviously hunting deer with hounds predates the discovery of America. Talk about a rich tradition!

Even so the practice is being threatened today by a mushrooming population that is eating up hunting land at an alarming rate. Just finding a place to hunt is becoming a problem for many hunters. The desire to hunt with hounds compounds that problem. A pair of stand or still-hunters can enjoy good deer hunting on a 10-acre plot of land, but turn loose a pack of hounds on that same 10 acres and the community erupts. In today's hunting environment it just won't work, or as the politicians like to say "that dog won't hunt."

Today most deer hunting with hounds is done in clubs where the members pool their resources to lease large tracts of land, often the land of eastern timber companies. Given sufficient acreage away from human populations, they can hunt successfully without disturbing the nonhunting public.

Smaller clubs or groups of hunters may use only a few small beagle hounds—or even bird dogs to drive deer. Man drives are another possibility.

But hounds or dogs of other breeds are not essential to successful deer hunting. Just look at the vast west of the Blue Ridge country where the use of dogs to hunt deer has been illegal for years. Or throughout most of the United States for that matter. Hunting deer with hounds is an exception instead of the rule. So let's rule out dogs for the purposes of this discussion.

With modern archery tackle and muzzleloading firearms complementing conventional firearms, today's deer hunter enjoys a lot of options. The compound bow has made the archer a highly effective hunter, and the modern muzzleloading rifles are a tremendous improvement over those used during the period of history they represent. Dogs cannot be used during the special archery and blackpowder seasons—even in eastern Virginia where deer dogs are otherwise legal.

*You can have a quiet day in the woods and still be a successful deer hunter.*

©Dwight Dyke

*Still-hunting is challenging but probably not as productive as hunting from a well-placed tree stand.*

Throughout the vast range of the white-tailed deer, hunters employ a pair of generally accepted hunting methods, stand-hunting or still-hunting. Most other methods are variations of these. The two are often confused, the term still-hunting is often applied incorrectly to stand-hunting—I suppose because the hunter doesn't move about or walk. Even hound hunters use stands, but they do not still-hunt.

Nope, the stand-hunter doesn't move. In fact when a deer is approaching his stand he doesn't even breathe! In most hunting clubs where hounds are used, the hunter is placed on a stand with orders not to move from it until the hunt master returns.

Stand-hunting is also popular among those who hunt without dogs. The stand may be on the ground or an elevated one. The elevated stand takes many forms. It may be a folding elevated stand such as is often used in the brush country of Texas. Such a stand is portable. It is easily erected or taken down for moving to another more promising point. In Virginia, however, this stand is rarely used. One reason is the abundance of forestlands and the ready-made stands in the way of trees. Portable tree stands are very popular. There are many different styles on the market and all can be moved easily and quickly.

The other approach is a permanent stand. These also take many forms. Often it is no more than a ladder to a platform in the crotch of a

tree, a sturdy and comfortable seat on which the hunter sits quietly. Once in place, it becomes pretty much a fixture. I like to add a strong line with which I can pull up or lower my bow or firearm. Ideally the permanent stand should be enclosed with netting, canvas, or some other material that conceals the hunter. For years I've heard that deer don't look up, but I'm not so sure anymore. At the minimum they seem to be able to sense a hunter's presence even when there is no wind to carry his scent to them. Some tree stands even have roofs for protection from the weather. A real joy on a rainy day.

The location of a stand, particularly a permanent one, is critical. The archer whose range is very limited has to place his stand with that in mind. The ideal place is just off of a well-used trail. Another good spot is a white oak ridge, but it may not be productive during years when the mast crop is low. Just keep in mind that your stand should give you a shot at 30 yards or less. And make sure there are good shooting lanes. Having a deer well within range, but completely blocked by heavy foliage can be very frustrating.

Firearms hunters have more options in the location of stands. A key requirement here is good visibility for a reasonable distance. For muzzleloaders a shot of 100 yards is a safe one, and the rifleman has considerably more range. Long range shots from elevated stands are possible if the visibility is good. This usually means a stand overlooking a large field or other open space. Being careful about the background is a cardinal rule of safety in hunting with a rifle, but it is less of a problem for the hunter shooting from an elevated stand. If he misses, the angle of his shot will most likely put his bullet in the ground in the vicinity of the spot where stood the deer that escaped him.

The successful deer hunter sees the deer before the deer sees him. This is the advantage of an elevated stand. It gives the hunter the jump on his quarry. While the elevated stand puts the hunter above the normal vision of the deer, that doesn't mean that he can throw caution to the wind. He still needs to sit as quietly and inconspicuously as possible.

And while his human scent is less of a problem on an elevated stand, it can still reach an approaching deer. Masking scents are a good idea, particularly for the bowhunter, and to a less extent for the muzzleloading hunter or the conventional rifleman.

I always enjoy a session on an elevated stand even if I don't get a deer. The opportunity to watch wildlife is enhanced by the elevation. Just this past season I had a dozen squirrels play around my stand for hours. Songbirds flit about close by, and honking geese pass overhead. Stand hunters often bag turkeys as well as deer. They generally pass up shots at squirrels or other small game, feeling the critters are not worth the disturbance shooting them creates.

Still-hunting is an entirely different game, one difficult for the bowhunter to use because of his limited range. The still-hunter moves, hoping that by doing so he can get within range of a deer before the deer detects him. It's a look and listen, move, and look and listen again approach. Most deer are taken during the looking and listening stops. A deer is less likely to see the hunter then than when he is on the move. Still-hunting is a very challenging way to hunt, but probably a little less effective than hunting from a well-placed stand.

Still-hunting is a good choice when hunting new territory that the hunter hasn't had a chance to scout. This does not, however, mean that scouting prior to the hunt is unnecessary. Scouting will tell the hunter when and where to expect deer, and he can concentrate his efforts in those areas.

The still-hunting technique is somewhat simple, but it calls for good woodsmanship. The hunter selects the area he wants to hunt, checks the wind, and moves into it if possible. This blows his scent away from deer he might be approaching.

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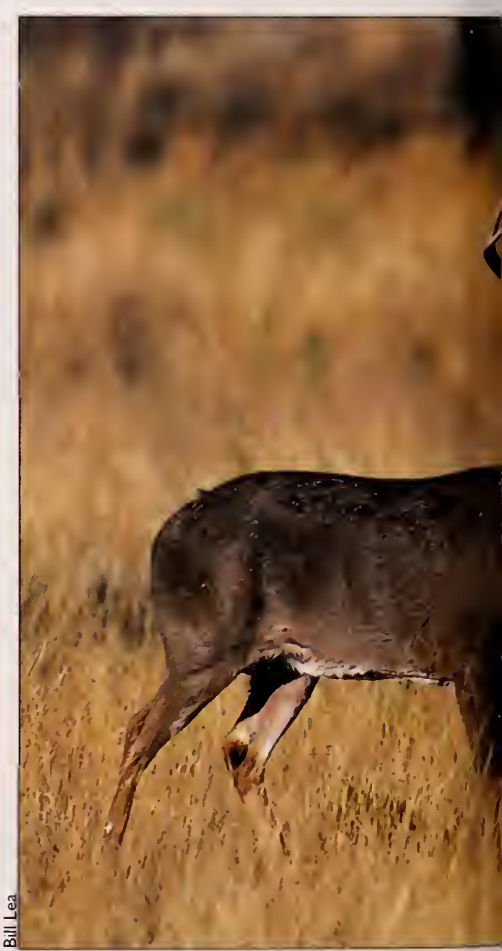


Bill Lea

***(Above)*** *Location of your tree stand is critical for success.*
***(Below)*** *Deer are wary and almost any move by a hunter on the ground will be noticed.*

Never, never should he hunt with the wind to his back, even with a soft breeze to waft his scent to the deer. He will never see anything except whitetails bouncing off out of range. Though scent or human odor is the major concern, the wind can also carry foreign sounds.

Still-hunting is a slow process that demands the utmost in patience. The hunter enters his territory and immediately stops to look and listen. He should do this for 15 minutes at the least. If he sees or hears nothing he moves on. Before moving, however, he should look ahead for his next stopping point, and move carefully toward it selecting his route carefully so as not to snap twigs, rustle leaves, or create any other foreign noises. That next stopping point should offer some kind of concealment if nothing more than a tree trunk to break up the hunter's outline. Also, I personally like to chose one that offers a rest for my rifle—a tree limb, for example. Using a rest to steady the aim is much better than shooting off hand.

The still-hunter's clothing should be of soft finish so it will not be noisy when brushing against briers or other ground cover. He should also wear boots with reasonably soft soles to muffle his steps. Strange sounds as jingling loose coin in a pocket is definitely not natural to the woods.

Deer supposedly are color blind so blaze orange doesn't frighten them if it is not moving. I believe, however, that a deer can pick up moving blaze orange better than it can moving dull colors. For that reason it is probably best to limit blaze orange to the torso which does not move as much as the arms, legs, and head.

The hunted deer is in its natural environment and tuned in to all of the normal sights and sounds. Violate those and a hunter's chances drop considerably. Deer quickly pick up strange objects in their home territory. And a hunter standing out there in the open is something out of place, something that wasn't there yesterday. For that reason, just backing up against the trunk of a tree can help.

Frightened birds, squirrels, and other critters serve to warn deer. Try to move so that such wildlife activity is kept to a minimum.

Over the years I've probably taken more deer from stands than while still-hunting, but I still enjoy this challenging kind of hunting. Looking back over the most recent season, I find that I took two deer from elevated stands, one in South Carolina and one in Virginia. Another Virginia deer was taken from a stand on the ground, and my largest deer, a Wyoming mulie, was taken by still-hunting.

Hound hunters don't have to do a lot of scouting. They instead rely upon their crack dogs to route the deer out and get them moving. Hunters switching from hounds to stand or still-hunting are often slow to make this adjustment. The more scouting the stand or still-hunter can do, however, the better are his chances. This can be an all year activity. Many hunters are back in the woods soon after the season closes looking for sign that will help them the next season. A fresh snowfall can be alive with sign, particularly tracks. Some seem to wander and tell the hunter little, but sooner or later, tracks will mark a well-used trail.

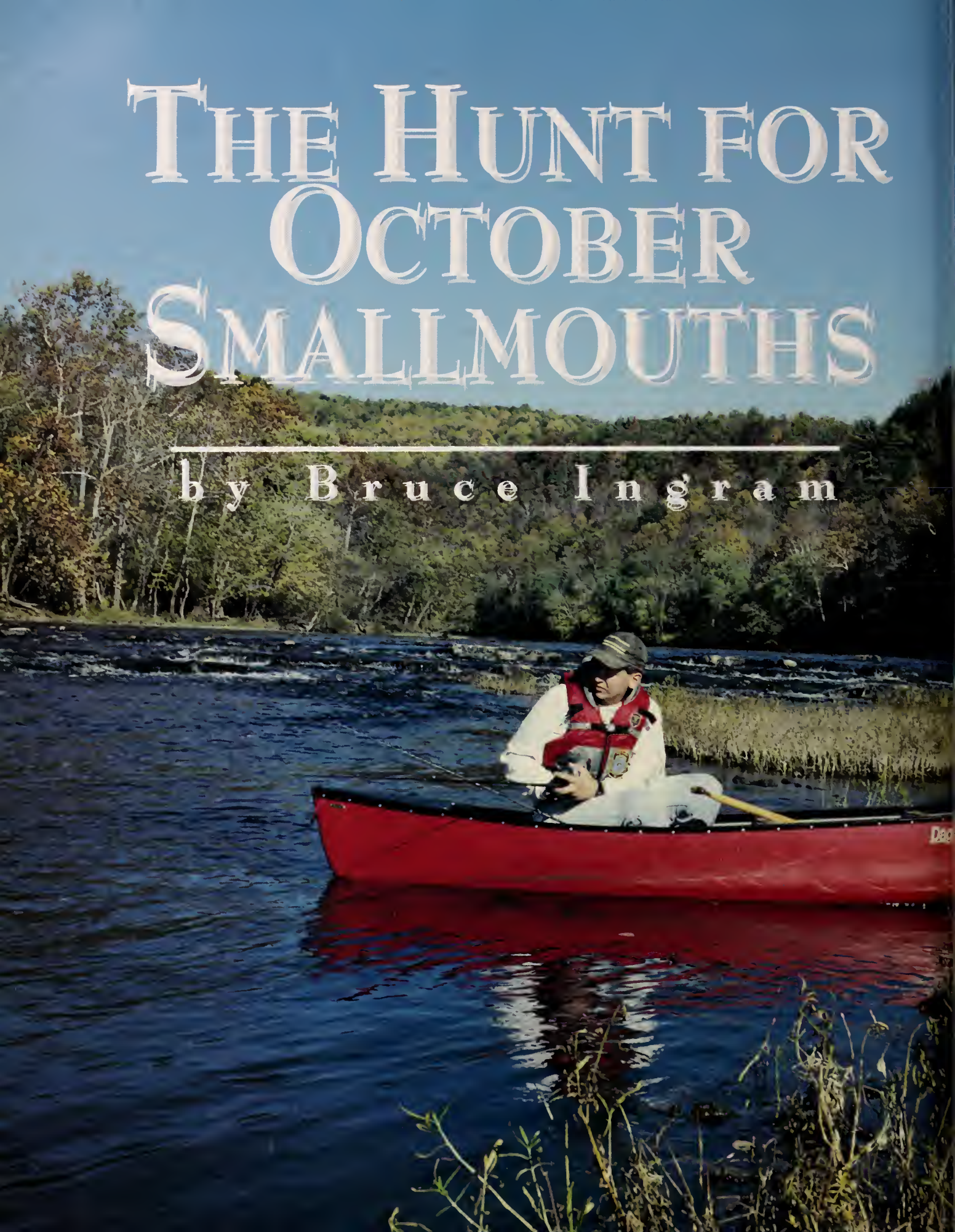
The phases of the moon are also important to the still-hunter. On a full moon, for example, the deer may feed most of the night, bed down at dawn, and begin moving again around noon.

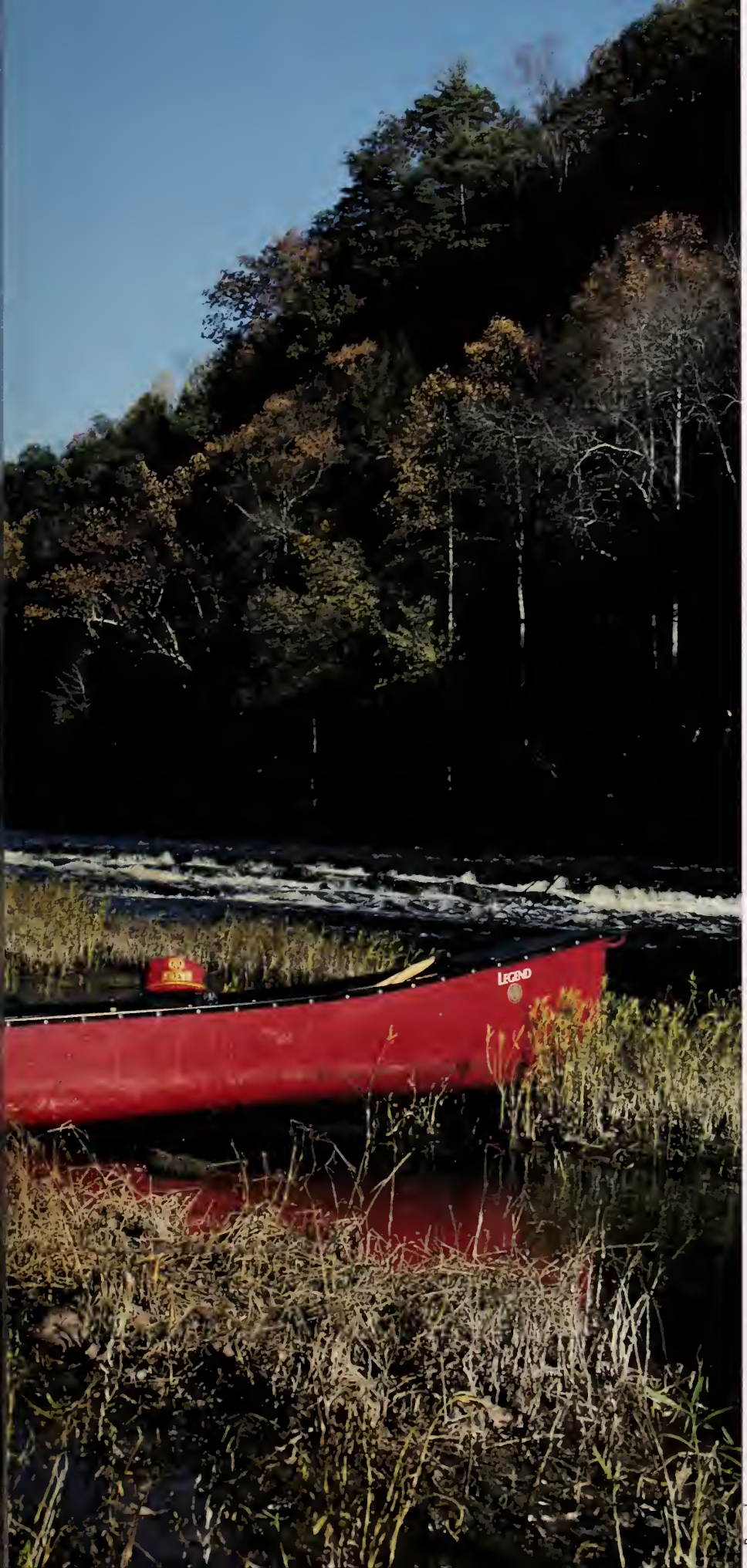
I've hunted ahead of hounds, but in recent years I've taken most of my venison by stand or still-hunting. Outwitting a wily old buck can be a real challenge, but over the years I've learned that that old buck is more likely to outwit me. □

*Bob Gooch is an outdoor columnist and has authored many books on hunting and fishing. He lives in Troy, near Charlottesville.*

# The Hunt for October Smallmouths

by Bruce Ingram






Bruce Ingram

# Here's how to catch Virginia smallmouth bass in the fall

One of the greatest myths perpetrated by outdoor writers goes something like this…"with the dipping air and water temperatures of autumn, river smallmouths go on 'feeding binges' as they attempt to put on weight for the winter, resulting in the best bass fishing of the year." Actually, this premise is misleading on several accounts.

Bass experience feeding binges throughout the year, they always try to "put on weight," and the autumn period, in reality, sees bronzebacks going through intense mood swings resulting in some of the best bass fishing of the year…and unfortunately many times some of the worst and most frustrating.

To help Old Dominion river anglers smooth out the highs and lows of the autumn period, here is a game plan for dealing with three major problems state fishermen will face at this time.

## Problem One: Abnormally Low, Clear Water

After the long hot months of summer conclude, October often arrives with rivers such as the James, New, Rappahannock, and South Fork of the Shenandoah experiencing low water of a crystalline quality. Barry Loupe, a Saltville resident who is a part-time guide on the North Fork of the Holston, offers strategies that can help anglers cope with this condition.

"The most important thing I do in the fall is always use light, clear

line," he says. "I'll start out with eight-pound test, but if the fish on the Holston aren't biting I don't hesitate to drop down to six or even four-pound test. I also recommend that fishermen do not use fluorescent line which can spook fish in clear, low water.

"Second, I make extremely long casts, something that lighter line will enable you to do. As you float downstream, look for likely spots well downstream and to your right or left. A cautious approach is more important in the fall than at any other time."

Loupe adds that another good tactic is to seek out shady spots where mossybacks may hold in the transparent liquid. These could include crevices between ledges, dropoffs behind boulders, and tree laden shorelines. Sycamores are especially common trees on Virginia's upland rivers and offer extensive root networks along partially eroded banks for bass to hide within as well.

Finally, Loupe suggests that earth tones such as pumpkinseed, black, brown, and orange do better in clear water. Two of his favorite lures are a Zoom pumpkinseed crawfish and a brown spider jig.

## Problem Two: October Cold Fronts

After the relatively stable weather patterns of summer, October often brings a series of cold fronts which can play havoc with smallmouth feeding patterns. Tim Freese, a part-time guide on the upper Potomac and the Shenandoah system, relates that he combats this problem in several ways.

"For fall cold fronts, I follow two rules," says Freese, who hails from Arlington. "Rule number one is that I finesse fish, which means I fish slowly on the bottom and I use natural colors—no fire tiger or hot pink, for example.

"Rule number two is that whatever lure I use, I strive for absolute realism in presentation. That means that I really attempt to fool the bass into hitting something that looks very natural to them."

Freese, who guides for Reel Bass Adventures, emphasizes that the way he modifies and works a grub is a perfect example of his two rules. The Arlington angler selects a grub in natural colors that imitate shad, sunfish, or crawfish and above it slides a brass weight and then a red bead onto the line.

Freeze explains that the brass weight, and the exact size of it depends on how fast the current is flowing, simulates a baitfish eye and the red bead mimics the gills. He then rigs the grub weedless on a 1/0 or 2/0 hook and tosses it into crevices within ledges.

Smallmouth bass that have become lethargic because of the high blue skies and cool winds associated with cold fronts often descend into ledges. A grub crawled slowly through this type of structure very much cre-

Bruce Ingram

Bruce Ingram

*Crankbaits* ***(above)*** *work well in the summer, but fall anglers will have more success with earth tone plastic baits* ***(left).*** ***(Right)*** *Fall angling, with its cool water and clear skies, requires its own set of tactics.*

Bruce Ingram

ates the illusion of a pathetically dying creature that is often too tempting for even an inactive bass to pass up.

Freese adds that another superlative cold front bait is a deer hair jig tipped with a soft plastic pork frog. Again, natural colors such as brown, orange, and black should be the choice for both the hair jig and the trailer—let the fish tell you which combination of hues they prefer.

## Problem Three: Water Temperature Fluctuations

The third major problem that often confronts Old Dominion anglers come fall is a rapid change in water temperature. Dave Roland, who operates a media production business in Reston, says that he often encounters this condition on the upper Potomac and the South Fork of the Shenandoah.

"In October, Virginia often has really nice warm days, but the state also often experiences cold nights when the temperature dips below freezing," says Roland. "So the way I deal with this condition is to have a separate morning and afternoon fishing plan.

"For example, on mornings after a cold night I have found that fish on rivers such as the Potomac and Shenandoah congregate on the bottom along banks that have fairly deep water. So I bounce weedless grubs and weighted plastic jerkbaits along the bottom with my spinning outfit or weighted woolly buggers and muddler minnows with my fly rod."

As the sun comes up and the water warms, Roland explains that the fish often move off the bottom and into the main channel of a river to forage. They also become much more active and will rise to the surface to engulf minnows or various other forage.

Then, the Reston angler will turn to surface baits such as the Heddon Tiny Torpedo and Rebel Pop'R or fly rod poppers such as the Sneaky Pete. Roland recalls some early fall days on the Potomac and Shenandoah system when numerous good-sized bronzebacks fell to this "hit 'em low early and hit 'em high late" gambit.

Virginia's river smallmouth anglers know that those supposedly classic fall days when the fish ravage every lure in sight are typically rare. But a game plan that takes into account the common problems we face in early fall can still make this time on the water productive. □

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*Bruce Ingram is an outdoor columnist on the staff of* Southern Outdoors.

# Teal and Wood Ducks, a Colorful Beginning

by Curtis Badger

Bill Lea

From a distance, a flock of green-winged teal sounds like spring peepers. We heard them long before we saw them, a soft musical "cheeping" coming from the head of the creek beyond the pine woods.

They could have been spring peepers, but it was far too cold for any frog to be welcoming warm weather. Ice lay in thin glassy shards along the edges of puddles, and it formed a crystal fringe along the creek shore at the freshet, where the teal had congregated.

We crept through the pine woods as quietly as we could, eased ourselves down an embankment to the level of the salt marsh, and then hid behind a thicket of marsh elder and began counting teal. I counted on the up-creek side, and my son Tom counted from the opposite direction. When we reached midpoint, we'd have a good estimate.

*With duck numbers up, this year's early season may be one to remember.*

I scanned the flock with the binoculars, and when the sun caught a bird just right, it would light up the florescent green ear patch of the drakes, the cinnamon head, and the green speculum. And then I realized once again what beautiful little birds these are, sprightly, diminutive waterfowl that trade around this creekhead in small, fast flocks like shorebirds.

Our imprecise count stopped at 250 teal, yet we knew there were more. The creek wandered for another quarter-mile, meandering around tumps of cordgrass, forming shallow pools where freshwater streams came down from the upland. The teal would be gathered in those pools, invisible to us, dining on grasses and seeds. There could have been 500.

We had with us the binoculars, a

fanny pack containing a notepad, pocket knife, two oranges, and a compact camera. Any birds we bagged this day would be on film, with the point-and-shoot. After all, it was late February, and the season had long ago ended. But these wintering teal held great promise for the season to come.

For waterfowl hunters, the early season this fall could be one to remember. After a succession of dismal years in the 1980s, green-winged and blue-winged teal are making a substantial comeback, thanks to improved nesting conditions in the prairie pothole country. Add to the equation a stable population of wood ducks and a three-week resident Canada goose season in September, and waterfowl hunters have ample reason to be optimistic.

The 1996 aerial mid-winter waterfowl survey showed an increasing number of ducks in Virginia, surpassing the five-year average. The standardized survey, conducted along the major waterways east of Interstate 95, does not represent an exact bird census, but rather a pattern of population upswing or downswing, says Gary R. Costanzo, waterfowl research biologist with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The trend for most species is an increase in population.

This is good news for those of us who at the first cool days of late summer feel the urge to put aside the fishing rod in favor of the shotgun. After all, duck hunting in October can be a most pleasurable sport, a chance to put wild duck on the table without risking frostbite and hypothermia.

For most Virginians, the early waterfowl season centers around green-winged and blue-winged teal, wood ducks, a smattering of other dabbling ducks, and, of course, resident Canada geese. (The general duck season is October 9-12, November 26-30 and December 9-January 18. The early goose season ran from from early to late September.)

Productive hunting is expected across the state, with perhaps an emphasis on the Tidewater and Piedmont regions. Gary Costanzo, who has spent the summer months censusing and tagging waterfowl around the state, recommends the Back Bay area in southeastern Virginia, the Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area (WMA) on Morris Creek and the Chickahominy River, and Hog Island WMA on the James River for the resident goose season. All have extensive public access areas. Here's a look at some of Virginia's best bets for the early waterfowl season.

## Princess Anne WMA

The Game Department manages four major tracts in the Back Bay area near False Cape State Park and Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge south of Virginia Beach. The four tracts—Trojan, Pocahontas, Whitehurst, and Barbours Hill—are collectively known as Princess Anne WMA, and they include more than 1,500 acres of waterfowl habitat. Trojan, Pocahontas, and Whitehurst are on the western side of Back Bay, while Barbours Hill is on the east, in False Cape State Park.

"For the past 10 or 15 years, the Back Bay area has not been as productive a waterfowling area as it used to be, primarily because of the loss of aquatic grasses," says Costanzo. "But the grasses are coming back, and the waterfowl are returning."

Waterfowl hunting is managed by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and in the past has been based on a lottery system. That may change this year as negotiations continue between the state and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over public access to the state park, which is either by beach, by boat, or along the gravel roadways that make up the freshwater impoundments at Back Bay NWR.

*Early season waterfowl hunting is a chance to put duck on the table without risking frostbite and hypothermia. Photo by Soc Clay.*

In recent years, the refuge roads have been closed to the public during winter months to avoid disturbing waterfowl. A possibility under the new agreement is that Fish and Wildlife could take over management of state land in the northern part of False Cape, so duck hunters will have to stay tuned regarding opportunities in the Barbours Hill area.

On the other side of the bay, at Trojan and Pocahontas, 40 blind stakes are available to the public by daily drawing. The stakes are spaced at appropriate intervals, and hunters tie up to them with their own grassed boats.

In the early season, 80 percent of the birds taken at Princess Anne WMA will be teal, says Costanzo. Blue-winged teal move through the area first, sometimes as early as late August, but with late September and early October constituting the peak of the fall flight. The bluewings will hasten on to winter homes in Florida or Central and South America. Green-wings will pass through a little later, and do so at a more leisurely pace; some will spend the winter in the area if the weather is mild.

Both species of teal have done well in recent years, thanks to favorable conditions in their nesting areas in the Canadian provinces. The blue-winged teal is also expanding its nesting habitat to include the northeastern United States, Costanzo said, as changes in land use have created more open land and less forest.

## Chickahominy WMA

The Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area is on the eastern edge of Charles City County, about 12 miles southeast of Providence Forge and the same distance north-

west of Williamsburg. The eastern boundary is formed by the Chickahominy River, and Morris Creek meanders through the center of the property.

The area offers a wide variety of habitat for waterfowl hunters, from the open waters of the Chickahominy River to the more modest Morris Creek, as well as smaller streams, beaver ponds, and marshes. Floating blinds are allowed in the open water on a first-come-first-served basis, and the Chickahominy offers a good chance for teal or woodies during the early season. But, warns Costanzo, the WMA gets a lot of public attention because there are few public hunting lands in the area.

## Hog Island

Hog Island WMA, on the James River, is a good bet for the resident Canada goose season in September, Costanzo says, and will be open for duck hunting during the later seasons. Five permanent blinds are on the property, with more expected to be added in the near future. Blinds are assigned to hunters by a drawing.

Hog Island is on a peninsula in the James in Surry and Isle of Wight counties and is across the river from Busch Gardens. It offers a mixture of open farmland, timber, and tidal marshlands and ponds. Crops of milo and winter wheat are planted for wintering waterfowl, and there are 600 acres of controlled-water-level ponds designed for waterfowl and shorebird use.

Contact the VDGIF office in Williamsburg for applications for the blind drawing.

## Game Farm Marsh

This wildlife management area on Upper Chickahominy Lake near Providence Forge is one of Virginia's smaller WMAs, but its 400 plus acres offers lots of flooded timber, which makes it a magnet for early season birds such as teal and wood ducks. It could be one of the 1996 hot spots.

## Not to mention...

The public salt marshes on the Eastern Shore—Saxis in upper Accomack County and Mockhorn Island in Northampton—are better known for late season action, and, in the case of Mockhorn, for extraordinary rail shooting. But both could yield some early season teal shooting, depending upon the weather and how it drives the fall migration. A few other dabbling duck species, principally black ducks, mallards, and widgeon, could be found at both WMAs in the early season.

Saxis is on the Chesapeake Bay side of the peninsula, just south of the Maryland line, while Mockhorn is on the seaside, an inner island in the barrier island chain.

The Piedmont may be the most overlooked early season area in the state, says Costanzo. "Streams, wetlands, and beaver pond habitat provide lots of good early season duck hunting in the Piedmont. Many of Virginia's 33 wildlife management areas have such habitats. It's something hunters may have overlooked in the past."

## If you go ...

Migratory waterfowl hunting is governed by federal and state regulations. A state hunting license and a federal duck stamp are required. Be sure you are aware of limits, seasons, legal hunting times, and other regulations such as the use of steel shot. The state regulates hunting at wildlife management areas, and the rules can differ from one area to another. In some, hunting is allowed on a lottery basis. In others, it's first-come-first served. Contact the WMA you want to hunt for details, or call one of the regional offices of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Maps and regulations governing specific wildlife management areas are available at regional offices or from the VDGIF in Richmond, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230 1104.

A "Guide to Virginia's Wildlife Management Areas" has just been published and is available free of charge at district and regional offices. This 68-page atlas includes 29 maps featuring all of Virginia's 33 wildlife management areas, a state map, and a description of each area, with a summary of appropriate rules and regulations.

If you plan on hunting public lands in Virginia this fall, this new publication will be invaluable in planning your trips. □

## Regional Offices

Region 1
Williamsburg
5806 Mooretown Rd.
Williamsburg, Va 23188
757/253-7072

Region 2
Forest
Rt. 6, Box 410
Forest, VA 24551
804/525-7522

Region 3
Marion
Rt. 1, Box 107
Marion, VA 24354
540/783-4860

Region 4
Verona
P.O. Box 996
Verona, VA 24482
540/248-9360

Region 5
Fredericksburg
1320 Belman Rd.
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540/899-4169

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*Curtis Badger is a writer and photographer who lives along the Chesapeake Bay on the Eastern Shore.*

Green-winged teal;
photo by Gary Carter

Lee Walker

*Black powder hunters now have a variety of equipment choices from historic to modern.*

©Dwight Dyke

# Virginia's Latest New Deer Season

by Denny Quaiff

My heart was pounding so hard that I almost couldn't catch my breath. For the previous 25 minutes of this rainy morning I had watched the buck slowly work his way in my direction. Without any doubt this was the most outstanding animal that had ever presented himself in front of my stand. His wide, tall and massive set of antlers were something to behold. The .50 caliber black powder rifle was aimed at the buck looking straight at me just out of effective range. This was my first season muzzleloader hunting and only another deer hunter could imagine the thoughts racing through my mind.

The tall pine tree that supported my portable tree stand on the edge of the clearcut pine plantation aided the opportunity while this dominant buck marked his territory. Within a matter of seconds his attention zeroed in on an estrus doe that had walked out between us. The buck jerked his head and started trotting in her direction. With the hammer cocked I squeezed the trigger as the buck passed my post at some 45 paces.

When the smoke finally cleared I was reminded of the past week of hunting and the off-season months of preparation. Much of my success had come from a commitment to this new challenge.

Hunting whitetails with a single-shot muzzleloading rifle offers a narrow window of opportunity. It requires dedication on the part of the hunter to be ready for the moment of truth.

The best way to determine what equipment is right for you is to research as many manufacturers as possible. If you are interested in deer hunting with a muzzleloading rifle, or have already taken up the sport read on to learn what products and equipment may best serve your needs. I have provided a list of resources at the end of this article.

## Muzzleloading Rifles

Muzzleloading rifles come in a variety of calibers and barrel lengths. Virginia state game laws for deer hunting require that hunters use .45 caliber or larger and fire a single lead projectile. A muzzleloading rifle must load from the muzzle of the firearm and propel the projectile with at least 50 grains of black powder (or black powder equivalent).

There are three basic types of muzzleloading rifles, two of which use percussion caps to ignite the powder charge. The caplock rifles are the most practical and widely used among hunters today. Then there are the flintlocks that our forefathers carried during the early days

of our country. This front loader has a piece of flint in the cocking hammer. When the trigger is pulled the flint strikes a piece of steel that creates a spark in the fizzen pan to ignite the powder charge.

Flintlock rifles are the most challenging and difficult equipment to use when muzzleloader hunting. The hang-time from when the hammer falls until the main powder charge ignites and sends the bullet out the end of the barrel creates a much greater demand on the shooter for accuracy.

It is a known fact that any blackpowder rifle can give trouble in wet weather. Even the more modern percussion cap models can be difficult to keep dry in the rain, but flintlocks are more likely to misfire under these conditions. However, some deer hunters feel more a part of history while still enjoying success and the satisfaction of using the more primitive weapon.

With the limited space available, the information that follows will primarily pertain to percussion cap models of muzzleloading rifles.

Our modern day black powder nimrod has a wide range of rifles to choose from. It has become evident that manufacturers have continued to improve the quality and accuracy in their smokepoles each year.

The two types of percussion models commonly used in the field today are side hammers and in-line styles. I personally own five of these rifles. Two are side hammers and three are in-lines.

For those blackpowder hunters that prefer a more traditional rifle Thompson/Center Arms makes some great front-stuffers. My rifles of choice are the White Mountain Carbine and Renegade Models.

The little White Mountain Carbine has a 21" barrel that is lightweight and handles well in tight places. This rifle would appeal to a backwoods deer hunter who is on the move and demands a rifle for quick shots in thick cover. It is available in .50 and .54 calibers.

The Renegade rifle is a plain old work horse. It comes in right or left handed models, and offers either the .50 or .54 caliber bores with its 26" octagon barrel and the 1 in 48" twist shoots with amazing accuracy. At an overall length of 42 ½" and a weight of 8 pounds, this rifle is better suited for the stand hunter.

I have found both of these muzzleloaders to be very capable hunting rifles. Thompson/Center Arms is a household name in the muzzleloading industry and offers a satisfaction guarantee on all of its hunting equipment.

The other type of percussion rifle that has gained the most attention in recent years is the in-line ignition system. My first introduction to one of these styles was in the spring of 1991. Gonic Arms of New Hampshire sent me one of their GA87 Models for testing.

After talking with the experts at their factory and reading the instruction manual, out to the range I went. After several more trips to the

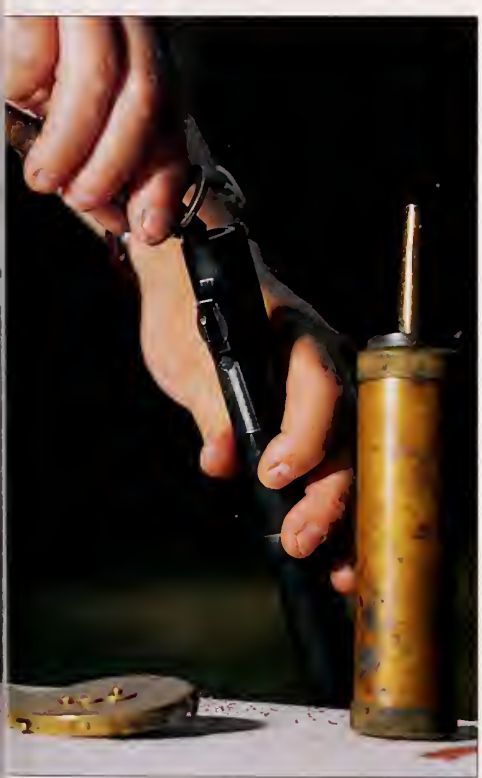
©Dwight Dyke

range and a little work with different powder charges, this rifle was producing outstanding target groups. It was obvious that a new age of muzzleloading hunting had begun.

In the fall of that year on a successful Montana antelope hunt the Gonic GA87 was my hunting rifle. The GA87 has also been my effective rifle on a number of whitetail hunts and proven worthy to all I have asked of it.

My second experience with another in-line rifle came in the spring of 1993. This time the rifle was the world renowned MK85. This offering from Modern Muzzleloading was their Knight Hawk model.

For the test I received a .50 caliber, but the rifle also comes in .54 caliber and a thumb-hole stock can be ordered for left or right handed shooters. This smokepole weighs 7.3 lbs. and measures 43" long. Its black composite stock comes set up with sling swivel studs. The MK85 Knight Hawk comes in a blued or stainless steel barrel.



*Modern in-line muzzle loaders, like this Remington 700ML, **(left)** increase range and accuracy. **(Above)** a "modern" powder measure. **(Right)** Horns such as this have been used for centuries as power containers*

The Knight Hawk has been my hunting partner during Virginia's 1994 and '95 special muzzleloading seasons. This rifle has gained my utmost respect for its noted field performance and would be a great choice for the muzzleloading hunter who demands the most of his equipment.

Just about the time I thought I had it all, Remington Arms, one of the industry leaders, came out with a new twist that is definitely getting a second look. The company is making a bold move that reaches back to its beginnings.

As America's oldest continuing firearms manufacturer, their first guns were naturally loaded from the muzzle. In an all-out effort the company will introduce two modern inline muzzleloaders built on the design of their famous Model 700 center fire rifle.

I had a chance to talk with Remington President and Chief Operating Officer Tommy Millner during a January trip to the Shot Show in Dallas. Mr. Millner said, "All of us at Remington are excited about the new Model 700ML and MLS Black Powder Rifle. We are confident that this rifle will be a leader with muzzleloading hunters."

Remington sent me their ML700 model that comes in the .50 caliber to test. The rifle has a fiberglass stock fitted with a magnum-type rubber recoil pad. A solid aluminum ram rod is recessed into the fore-end and when looking from a distance, this is the only way you can recognize that it is not a center fire rifle.

Hunters will also have the option of the MLS700 model. The only difference that I have found in this model is it can be purchased in .50 or .54 caliber and comes with a stainless steel barrel.

On a recent trip to the range I was very pleased to find the new Remington muzzleloading rifle to have exceptional accuracy with the same feel and balance of my M700 Mountain Rifle. After 15 years of hunting with my 30-06 it was a pleasure to find the same bolt and cocking motion with the new muzzleloading rifle.

This new black powder version of the notorious M700 Remington has my attention. Its breech is sealed by a stainless steel plug and nipple. The modified bolt has a large diameter cylindrical pin that is cocked much the same as a centerfire firing pin that is released by a smooth trigger pull to strike a No. 11 percussion cap. The company publishes the lock time of their rifle at 3.0 milliseconds which is the fastest ever available for a muzzleloading rifle.

My plans are to give this rifle a fair chance when the season opens this fall. From a company with history that dates back to 1816 there is no doubt in my mind that the new Remington muzzleloading rifles will be an industry leader in this increasingly popular sport.

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## Powder, Caps, and Bullets

When getting ready for your next muzzleloader hunt making sure that you have the right powder, caps, and bullets could play a critical role in the outcome. Let's take a look at some of the old and new products that just might fit in your possibles bag this fall.

Black powder comes in different granulations, FG, FFG, and FFFG being the most common. With FG being the coarsest and FFG most widely used in muzzleloading rifles for deer hunting.

Goex Black Powder is an old standby for hunters preferring the real thing. This company has been around for over 80 years and offers both the quality and consistency that hunters demand.

Another option for powder that is very popular with today's black powder hunters is Pyrodex manufactured by Hodgon Powder Company. There has been much discussion around the campfire regarding this modern-day development. However, I have found it to be much less corrosive than pure black powder. This product never let me down under the worst weather conditions the Rocky Mountains had to offer and I find it to be a very dependable alternative to black powder.

Both of these products come highly recommended from the muzzleloading industry. Always remember, never use smokeless powder in a muzzleloader. The muzzleloading rifle is not designed to handle the extreme pressures created when smokeless powder is ignited.

In my travels and discussions with other hunters I have found very few concerns regarding the No. 11 percussion cap. This could be the title to your next hard luck story and should not go overlooked.

After firing thousands of rounds, I've decided CCI and the Dynamid Nobel RWS to be my preference. These caps have stood up to the test and get my stamp of approval.

When discussing bullets for muzzleloading rifles most fall into three basic categories; round ball, conical bullet and sabot.

The round ball is most often used in barrels with a slow twist and performs with a exceptional accuracy in these rifles. Today, buckskinners looking for the more primitive approach prefer the round ball and accept its limits for foot pounds of energy down range.

Conical bullets are the most widely used type of projectile in muzzleloading rifles today. It has been my experience that the conical bullet performs better in more different rifles than any other bullet design.

There are an assortment of outstanding conical bullets available for muzzleloading rifles on the market today. Two years ago I discovered a bullet called "Black Belt" made by Big Bore Express of Boise, Idaho. This bullet comes in a wide range of sizes. It loads with ease and has been tested with exceptional results. This one is high on my list and I recommend it to those shooters looking for the very best in muzzleloading accuracy.

Most of the bullet choices now available to the black powder hunter are very recent developments. The sabot with modern pistol bullets opened a new world to the muzzleloading enthusiasts.

Again, the hunter must see what works best in his or her rifle. Many muzzleloading rifles perform more accuratelywith sabots and provide the hunter the right combination for a successful hunt.

In 1990, the Virginia General Assembly established the special muzzleloading license and the statewide early special season was set by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This one-week season for bucks only allowed 33,000 hunters to harvest 8,000 whitetails.

The early season that was extended to two weeks in 1993 now offers most of the state some either sex hunting days. During 1995, growing interest in muzzleloading hunting was strongly indicated by the fact that 88,000 deer hunters took to the woods with their black powder rifles. Hunting success was measured by 39,809 total deer taken.

Be sure to review your game law booklet before opening day and check with your local game warden or district biologist for any questions you may have. Make sure that you are very comfortable with your muzzleloading rifle and always practice good hunting safety.

Forty-eight states now offer hunters the challenge of hunting with a single-shot black powder rifle through special muzzleloading seasons. This additional hunting opportunity is here for all Virginians who are up to the test. I think John Wayne, one of America's greatest folk heroes said it best, "Always check your windage and elevation and make your first shot count." □

*Denny Quaiff is executive director of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association and senior editor of their publication,* Whitetail Times.

*Author after a successful black powder hunt*

## Manufacturers

Gonic Arms, Inc.
134 Flagg Road
Gonic, NH 03839
(603) 332-8456

Modern Muzzleloading, Inc.
P. O. Box 130
Centerville, IA 52544
(515) 856-2626

Remington Arms Company, Inc.
P. O. Box 700
Madison, NC 27025-0700
1-800-243-9700

Thompson/Center Arms Co.
P. O. Box 5002
Rochester, NH 03867
(603) 332-2394

Goex, Inc.
1002 Springbrook Ave.
Moosic, PA 18507
(717) 457-6724

Hodgdon Powder Company
6231 Robinson
Shawnee Mission, KS 66202
(913) 362-9455

Blount, Inc./CCI
P. O. Box 856
Lewiston, ID 83501
(208) 746-2351

Dynamit Nobel RWS, Inc.
81 Ruckman Road
Closter, NJ 07624
(201) 767-1995

Big Bore Express, Ltd.
7154 W. State St. #200
Boise, ID 83703
1-800-376-4010

# Handicapped Hunters Get a Hand from the Department

by David Hart

Finding a good place to hunt has always been difficult, especially for disabled hunters. Now, thanks to a cooperative effort between private organizations, citizens, local and county governments, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, handicapped hunters have another place to pursue one of the state's most popular activities.

One hundred and thirteen acres of the C. F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area, located in Fauquier County, is being set aside and improved for the exclusive use of hunters who are wheelchair-bound or otherwise disabled. This acreage, known as the Hogue tract after the family that donated the land, is separated from the rest of the 4,000 acre wildlife management area by the Rappahannock River.

Becky Norton Dunlop, State Secretary of Natural Resources, said the goal of this project is to increase recreational opportunities for all of Virginia's citizens.

Improvements will include a barrier-free paved trail that will be wide enough for trucks and maintenance vehicles. The trail, which will wind for about one mile through the hardwood forest and along the banks of the Rappahannock River, will have several spurs and cutbacks so hunters can cover all of the tract, said Rick Busch, wildlife biologist manager for that region. Busch also said eight to 10 elevated hunting platforms will be built to accommodate a wheelchair-bound hunter and an aid.

However, hunters aren't the only ones who will benefit from this new project. Two or three level platforms will be erected along the banks of the river for anglers, Busch said. These wooden structures will be placed close to the water at areas fisheries biologists have determined to offer good angling opportunities.

Gently sloping wooden ramps will allow disabled anglers easy access to these ramps.

Handicapped hunters and anglers aren't the only ones who were considered when this project was undertaken. Interpretive signs, which will teach visitors about the history of the area as well as the flora and fauna, will be erected along the trail.

Although there are special deer hunts available to disabled hunters throughout Virginia, none take place on Department-owned lands and none are managed solely by the VDGIF. Also, most of the handicapped-only hunts are on a permit-type or lottery-type basis and almost all are solely for deer. Busch said the area set aside at Phelps will be unique because disabled hunters will be able to come and go at will. There will be no need to make any prior arrangements and hunting will be allowed for all species in season. Disabled hunters are allowed to bring an assistant, but the assistant may not carry a gun.

This project, which will cost a total of $75,000, is being spearheaded by the Float Fishermen of Virginia. This statewide angling organization will provide one-third of the funds needed to complete the project; the rest will come from federal Pittman-Robertson funds set aside by the Department. No money from Virginia's general fund will be used to finance these improvements.

Although contractors will be hired to do some of the work, Dunlop said she expects volunteers from the local community and various organizations to participate in much of the labor.

"The more people that are involved in this project means the more people that feel like they have a part ownership in it," said Dunlop.

Busch said construction should be completed by the 1996 hunting season.

Since this is a first-of-its-kind project for the VDGIF, Busch said he expects a few minor bugs that will have to be worked out as the season progresses. The Phelps WMA is within reasonable driving distance to Northern Virginia, the most populated part of the state, as well as Fredericksburg, Culpeper and Warrenton. If crowding does become a problem, he said the area may have to go to some sort of lottery or reservation system to ease hunting pressure.

Also, he was concerned about the fishing platforms along the banks of the river. The Rappahannock, like any free-flowing river in Virginia, is subject to periodic flooding. The wooden fishing platforms could get wiped out by high water and debris.

"But," Busch said, "we'll cross that bridge when we get to it." □

# Before The Hunt Sight-in Your Rifle

by Kermit Reel
Photos by Dwight Dyke

Sighting-in (zeroing) your rifle is perhaps the most important, but least emphasized, thing you can do in preparing for the big game season. Failure to determine if your rifle will shoot to the desired point of impact may mean you do not bag a trophy, or that your freezer will not be stocked with a winter's supply of top quality meat. But much worse is the possibility that you will hit an animal in a non-vital area; the wounded animal will trot off to die a painful, lingering death—and you don't even realize that you hit it.

In 20 years of conducting, or participating in, Sighting-In Days sponsored by shooting clubs, I have found that many hunters do not ap-

preciate the importance of sight adjustment; in other words, they do not understand the critical relationship between the line of sight (what you see through the sights) and the trajectory of the bullet (the bullet's path), and what must be done to cause the line of sight and the bullet to converge (or, more simply, to allow the bullet to hit the target).

I offer the following suggestions for sighting in your rifle before the season opens.

- *Tighten your screws*
- *Clean barrel and chamber*
- *Have a good rest*
- *A scope is necessary*

Kermit Reel

*The author and his wife Marie (right) make sighting-in a family activity.*

## Suggestions for Sighting-In Hunting Rifles

*Courtesy of the Rivanna Rifle and Pistol Club*

### *Before Going to the Range*

*Tighten Screws.* Check guard or stock screws for tightness. If these are loose, consistent shooting is highly unlikely. Likewise be sure that rear sight screws—telescope or iron sights—are tight. If you have a telescope, check both the mount and ring screws.

*Clean Barrel and Chamber.* Remove all oil and grease from the bore and chamber. If this is not done shooting may be erratic, and in some cases excessive pressure may result.

*Obtain Sufficient Hunting Ammunition.* There is always the temptation to use odd lots or leftover ammo for sighting-in. Don't do it! Different bullet shapes and weights, and different loads, will group differently. Always sight-in your rifle with the ammunition you will use hunting.

### *On the Range*

*Use a Rest.* To sight-in a rifle properly, you should eliminate as many causes of unsteadiness as possible. This means using a rest of some sort. If a bench rest is available, use it; if not, shoot from the prone position. In either case support your hand and the forearm of the rifle with a sandbag or some other reasonably soft object. Never lay the barrel on or against anything hard as the rifle will jump away from a hard surface when fired, causing the bullet to strike some distance from the normal point of impact.

*Start Zeroing at Short Enough Distance to Hit Paper.* If you think your rifle is reasonably well sighted-in, start at 100 yards. If you have a new rifle or scope, or if for any reason you don't know where the rifle will shoot, start zeroing at 25 yards. When you are fairly close at that range, you can move to 100 yards and be fairly certain that you will be on the paper.

*Basic Sight Adjustment Rule.* Move the rear sight in the direction that you want the strike of the bullet to move. (If your shot is low, you want to move the next one up—so you move the rear sight up.)

## Changing to Meet the Challenge

One of the Department's first fish hatcheries is ever-changing to meet the challenges of providing resources for the sportfisherman. One of the recent changes at the Buller Hatchery, in Smyth County, near Marion, is an addition to the hatchery so muskies, northern pike and other species can be reared more efficiently.

C.D. Stickley, hatchery superintendent, along with his staff of Steve Morris, Buddy Alexander, Terry Call and Jonathan Howard, built, plumbed, and wired the block building addition that holds six new rearing tanks. Construction began in 1994, and was completed in 1996. The tanks are fitted with automatic feeders as well as an ultra-violet (UV) filter on the water supply, which has remedied some of the aggravating disease problems. The new addition and tanks replace an aging, makeshift structure built some distance away over one of the old, concrete hatchery ponds.

Mainly muskies and northern pike are reared here. Stickley and his staff converted some stock (cattle) tank heaters to enable them to elevate water temperatures to at least 60 degrees or more. Water taken from the South Fork Holston River is 50 to 55 degrees which is a little cold for muskies and pike. The warmer temperature helps the musky and pike fry and fingerlings grow better and faster. The stock tanks are working well but can still be improved, Stickley said.

Concerning musky propagation, Stickley said, "It's been a trial and error year on muskies. We 'raised-out' 10,000 2-inch fingerlings this year." Musky fry are raised in the inside tanks, then are stocked out in the large outside rearing ponds at Buller. "The benefit to having these inside rearing tanks is that we can hold them longer inside, feeding them dry food, which has been very successful in Pennsylvania.

©Dwight Dyke

*Loading the automatic feeder.*

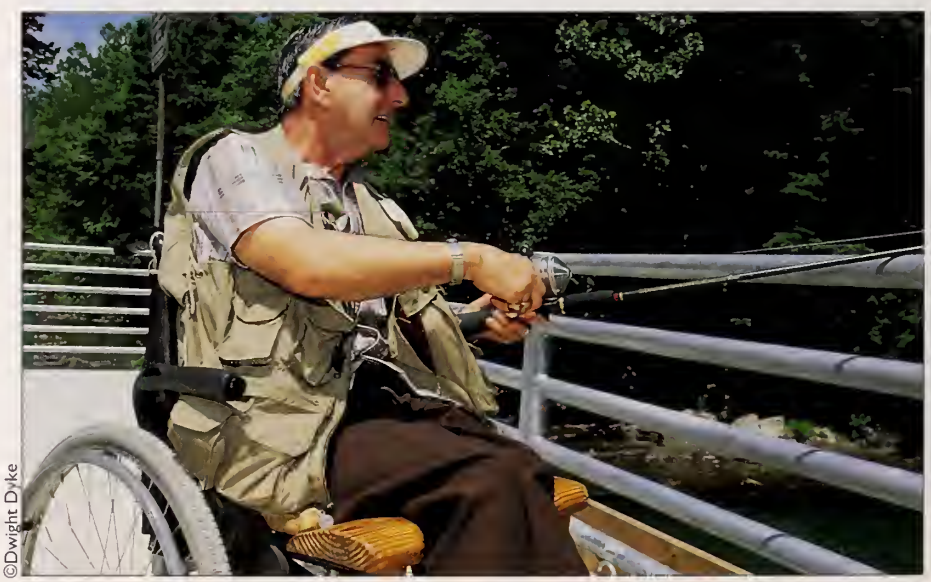
This allows the fathead minnows in the outside ponds to get a head start on spawning, hatching, and growing naturally. They then provide plenty of natural forage for the growing muskies when they need it most. About mid-July, the large, grown-up fingerlings of about four to eight inches in size are removed by seining, then stocked out in suitable waters around the state.

Some 6,000 northern pike fingerlings from about 5 to 7 inches in length were in the tank during mid-July. About the latter part of August and early September, they too were stocked in suitable Virginia lakes. □

## New Handicapped-Accessible Fishing Facility on South Fork Holston

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries recently completed construction of a handicapped-accessible fishing pier or platform, and a paved parking area adjacent to the South Fork Holston River at the Buller Hatchery in Smyth County. The access area was developed and built by the Fisheries Division in conjunction with maintenance operations performed at the hatchery's water intake. According to fisheries biologists, the pier was designed with disabled anglers in mind and will provide a unique opportunity for these anglers to fish for trout in a coldwater stream.

"This is the Department's first handicapped-accessible pier located on a trout stream, in the state," said Bill Kittrell, biologist in the Marion Regional office. This particular section of the South Fork Holston is managed as a "put and take" trout stream from October 1 through June 15 each year, but also contains a healthy wild trout population. For more information on this, contact the Marion Regional Office at (540) 783-4860. □



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# Habitat

by Nancy Hugo

## Witch Hazel

Witch hazel is a native shrub or small tree that proves the most interesting plants in the woods aren't always the most spectacular. Although witch hazel's leaves often turn a nice yellow in the fall and its unusual flowers bloom when little else does, it's not for these leaves or flowers that this plant is most well known; it's for the oil distilled from its twigs, branches, and bark. The species that grows in the understory of Virginia woods, *Hamamelis virginiana,* is the species from which witch hazel, the astringent, is made, but more on that later.

Witch hazel can be found in moist woodlands and along stream margins in almost every Virginia county, but it's easily overlooked until fall. Late fall is when its yellow flowers usually bloom in clusters along the stem. They have ½ inch, strap-like petals that hang like twisted ribbons from cup-shaped calyxes. The plant's odd-shaped seed pods are unusual, too. These ½ inch woody capsules which Thoreau described as looking like they were clothed in close-fitting buckskin, snap open in the fall, projecting the plant's shiny seeds as far as 20 to 30 feet. The sound of their snapping explains one of witch hazel's other common names "snapping hazel," and the sound of their falling, so many feet away from the parent tree, explains to some why this plant is associated with witches. (Dozens of other explanations have been offered to describe the origin of the name witch hazel. Some authorities say settlers confused this native tree with the European hazel, a tree associated with witches. Others say the "witch" part of the name may be related to our modern word *switch* or to the Old English word *wick*, meaning living.)

Whatever the name's origin, this tree seems to have long been associated with magical powers. American Indians reportedly first suspected its medicinal powers, concluding that any tree that bloomed after its leaves were gone must have some special magic, and early settlers used forked branches of witch hazel as divining rods, believing a downward tug on the branch indicated the presence of underground water. More prosaic uses of the tree include the use of its hard, close-grained wood to make bows and the use of the tree's seeds, buds, or twigs as wildlife food. Ruffed grouse, wild turkey, pheasant, bobwhite, deer, beaver, rabbit, squirrels, and other small mammals reportedly use witch hazel to a limited extent in their diets.

Hal Horwitz

Hal Horwitz

***Top:*** *Witch hazel leaves and flowers.*
***Above:*** *Witch hazel fruit.*

Another notable aspect of this tree is the presence of small, pointy, upright galls on its leaves. These conical galls, formed by insects, are so outlandish looking they can almost be used as field marks to help identify the tree when it's in leaf but not in flower. Naturalists Gupton and Swope describe them as looking like witches' hats—a good association to help anchor this tree's name in the mind of a child.

It's the "aftershave connection" that interests most people in witch hazel, however. If you've ever slapped your face with witch hazel aftershave or treated a bug bite with witch hazel lotion (both are uses for the same watery liquid you can buy in pint bottles for about 89¢), you've been applying a distillate of this tree. I tracked down the distributor and then the manufacturer of the witch hazel sold in my grocery store and found out most witch hazel is harvested in New England by farmers who have turned its harvest into a "nice little industry." According to Tom Johnson, a chemist who works for the company in Essex, Connecticut, where Witch Hazel (Hamamelis Water) is manufactured, the tree's twigs, branches, and bark are loaded into a "still," steam is applied, and the vaporized oils are then condensed on the other side of the distillation apparatus. (The tree's leaves aren't used commercially, although lots of advocates of home remedies suggest the tree's oils could be distilled from these, too.) According to Johnson, witch hazel really does work as an astringent, tightening skin and closing pores. The label on a bottle of Witch Hazel lotion also suggests it can be used "For the relief of minor skin irritations due to insect bites, minor cuts, or minor scrapes," but I was skeptical about this until I used it to treat an arm abraded by that awful bur cucumber *(Sicyos angulatus)* that grows along riverbanks. If you've ever pulled a canoe out of the water and into bur cucumber, a vine with big maple-like leaves, you know the vine I mean. It tears your skin like sandpaper and leaves a mean rash behind. Witch hazel, I am pleased to report, works like magic to remove the rash and take the sting out. □

# Safety

by Col. William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer

# How To Enjoy Safe Boating More Than Ever

In a recent article I discussed interesting new and sometimes different items which boaters might be able to use in order to make boating more fun. I have found a few more to tell you about.

Boaters often find that they do not have a tide table when they need one. The answer to their problem is the tide watch. Now they can have a graphic display of tides right on their wrists at all times. They will know what the tides are doing every day of the year. Not only that, but a tide watch usually has a graphic display of the height and direction of tides, a countdown timer and a conventional calendar...reference to a tide chart is advised when setting the tide watch. Most tide watches are waterproof to 100 feet and cost about $65.00 Tide clocks are also available.

Automatic focus binoculars are easier to use than the common variety. There are a couple of buttons on top which, when depressed, cause the binoculars to constantly change focus as required. The result is that objects being viewed are always in sharp focus. That feature is particularly important when looking at fast moving objects.

Some inflatables now come with aluminum decks. Roll-up boats make a lot of sense because they combine the performance of a sportboat with the portability of a dingy. The problem has been to design a boat with a deck that is stiff enough on the water, yet, light and flexible when stored. Some new roll-up boats use hinged marine-aluminum which locks-in place to form rigid lightweight decks that can be rolled in or out of the boats. The secret is the interlocking extrusions which hinge down to roll up. They are rock- solid when flat.

Some boaters pull more than one type of trailer with the same vehicle. One might be a boat-trailer, another could be a utility trailer or a PWC trailer. The problem could be that the boat trailer mates to a 2" ball and the other trailers need a 1 7/8" ball. The solution is to mount both size balls on the same receiver hitch.

Balls come in male and female forms. The former is mounted on a male stud, the latter in a threaded hole. One of each can be purchased and screwed together on the hitch. Some balls have coarse threads and some fine so their compatibility must be checked before purchase.

New on the market is an L-shaped seat for inflatable dingies which pamper the derriere. Much more comfortable than a hard seat, this one is 41 inches long and 34 inches wide. Molded-in eyelets permit lashing in place. The cost is about $30.00.

Towing fun can be doubled with the "tube for two" which is actually two large tubes fastened together like Siamese twins. They usually feature heavy-duty, 3-gauge PVC with electronically welded seams and tough 840 denier coated nylon cover. The combined tubes make quite a large item, about 56 X 91 inches total. The cost is about $150.00.

High quality, better than ever, filters are available for both gasoline and diesel engines. The latest model fuel filters are fascinating in their operation. As the dirty fuel mixture travels down the center of the filter, it reaches a cone-shaped passage where the pressure of the fuel drops dramatically. That pressure drop causes the water and dirt to fall out of solution and settle in the bowl at the bottom of the filter Additional surfaces attract the remaining water which beads and falls to the bottom. Finally, the fuel passes through the filter element and the remaining particulate matter and water is removed. By using the depressurizing cone, prior to the filter element, a finer filter (2 microns) can be used because the fuel is cleaner when it reaches the filter element. There are few things more satisfying in life than draining a cup of gritty water, from a high quality fuel filter, before it had a chance to get into the engine.

I was surprised to learn, when winterizing my boats, that I could no longer use the regular antifreeze that I use in my cars; Now I use a potable antifreeze, environmentally safe, which is a low-toxicity replacement for conventional antifreeze. It makes sense because, when the engines are started in the spring the antifreeze is usually discharged into the water. Conventional antifreeze is usually a deadly poison. Propylene glycol antifreeze is just as effective as the conventional, deadly ethylene glycol and it is non-toxic, tasteless, and orderless. □

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# OCTOBER AFIELD

by Jack Randolph

October, the month of the harvest moon, usually brings us the first real relief from the heat and humidity of summer. It is the month when goldenrod continues to guard the roadsides, its yellows mingling with the scarlet of sumac against the tapestry of autumn hues as the green leaves change to the distinctive autumn uniform of their species. This year the harvest moon will shine its brightest on the last days of this golden month.

October is the traditional month of harvest. It is the time when acorns and nuts fall and wildlife has an opportunity to find lots to eat before the thin months come and food is scarce.

Fishermen, their ranks thinned by the lure of the hunting season, look to October as one of the best months of all to fish in Virginia. The hatchery trucks are rolling again and the trout fisherman can bring along his .22 rifle to collect a few squirrels to build the mountain man's answer to surf and turf.

For the salt water angler, this is a great month. Spot, croakers, flounder, and other species form up and start the long swim down the bay as they participate in the annual fall exodus. Smart fishermen set up an ambush in the lower bay. The Small Boat Channel, inside the first island of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, is a good place. Here they collect enough big croakers and spot to fill their freezers or to salt down to become the main attraction at a future deer camp breakfast.

Offshore, schools of big, chopper bluefish will appear later in the month as the blues head to warmer waters for winter. Closer inshore, generally off the Eastern Shore, look for schools of gray trout, often mixed with croakers. These trout are usually on the small side with an occasional "tide-runner" showing up, but the scant, four trout daily limit removes much of the incentive to fish for them. Fishing for other species can be more productive. This, for example, is also the time of year when tautog and sea bass fishing picks up.

In good years this is the time to catch speckled trout, but this hasn't been a good year for the species. However, in mid-month the tidal water striped bass season reopens and hardly anyone will be missing the trout. Yet, even the striper fishing needs time to get going. The October part of the season is usually a bit on the slow side and the stripers run small. They really don't get rolling until the water temperatures drop.

On the Eastern Shore in the surf of the Barrier Islands the red drum will be on the prowl again, providing some of the best surf fishing for this species along the East Coast.

This is the time of year when freshwater landlocked stripers commence to stir in such waters as Smith Mountain Lake, Buggs Island Lake, and Lake Gaston. At first they will be lean from the hot summer's fasting, but they will soon fatten up. As the leaves take on color, crappie and pickerel will begin to hit and bass start to feed more heavily to prepare for the coming winter. October is the month when smallmouth bass fishing puts on its grand finale. As the water temperatures start to fall the smallmouth action drops right along with it. By the end of the month most of the canoe liveries on the smallmouth rivers are closed—but fishing is only half of the story.

October is also a month for the hunter starting with doves and rails. The early duck season which, while only a few days long, accounts for about 25 percent of the total Virginia harvest of ducks and is very popular throughout the Commonwealth. It is during this brief period that the vast majority of Virginia wood ducks are accounted for. This is the time when the services of a good retriever are appreciated as the willing pooches root out the wood ducks from the dense grasses where they often drop when shot.

The squirrel season opens in the northern half of the state this month, which means it is now open statewide. The big excitement is the opening of the bowhunting season for deer and turkeys and, a week later, the opening of the archery season for bear.

Hound music will enrich the night air about mid-month when the seasons for hunting raccoons and opossums open, while late in the month the mountains will echo shotguns as hunters celebrate the opening of the grouse, turkey, and woodcock seasons.

When the bowhunting season opens many hunters take to the trees where they hunt from tree stands. It is a time that calls for caution. Hunters hunting from trees are wary of squirrel hunters with whom they are sharing the woods, but the greatest danger comes from the tree stands themselves. They are as deadly as firearms and account for nearly as many serious accidents.

Homemade or abandoned homemade tree stands are frequent causes of these dangerous accidents. Some are also due to hunter negligence, generally the hunters failure to learn how to use his stand. Other tree stand accidents are the result of some weird gun handling.

This reminds me of a fellow who was deer hunting with a bow and arrow out West quite a few years ago. To keep his broadheads sharp he placed his arrows in small holes in his truck bed. He had them in there point up. It might have been a good idea had he not forgotten and sat on an arrow as he changed his boots! □

Photo TipS

By Lynda Richardson

# "A Remote Possibility"

It was really hot. Melting in my truck on a steamy Virginia day, I pulled another cold, wet sponge from a bag of ice and pressed it against my forehead. Binoculars rested precariously on the hot steering wheel and my hand clenched the trigger.

Three hundred feet of telephone wire snaked leisurely along the ground in front of me, crossing a road, climbing a fire wall and reclining along its top to disappear on the opposite side. With 10 X 50 binoculars I could see its path continue up a 10 foot ladder to a mass of metal, plastic, and duct tape; my remote camera.

I was trying to photograph a pair of kestrels, also known as sparrow hawks, which had chosen a well placed nest box designed for their use. Inside the box, three fiesty youngsters waited for a breakfast in bed of grasshoppers and dragonflies.

Using remote cameras can be one of the most frustrating, challenging, and exciting ways to take pictures of wildlife. With proper planning, a lot of creativity and patience, one can capture images of animals during their daily activities using lenses which require close proximity, not something wild animals normally allow you. In these situations, remote cameras are the only way to capture such moments.

Remote cameras are set up based on whether the photographer or the animal itself is triggering the camera. Radio waves and hard wire remotes are usually triggered by the photographer. Infrared, pressure contacts and light switches are usually triggered by the subject. Some set ups, such as those used to photograph the NASA shuttle launches, take advantage of sound to fire a camera. In the case of the kestrels, I used a hard wire remote which I triggered by hand.

Now, let's talk about the critters we're photographing. Animals are very aware of their environment and any changes that may take place in it. In remote photography, you will be placing an unfamiliar object in your subject's territory which in turn creates stress for the animal particularly if the camera is placed near a nest or den site. For this reason, you must acclimate the animal to your set up or you might scare the animal from the site causing it to move or abandon its young.

In every case, I observe my subject first. I try to learn a pattern of habits that can help me place the camera (and sometimes a blind) in an inconspicuous location but at the same time still get the photograph I desire. To do this, I first create a faux camera. By nailing together left over pieces of 2X4 into a camera/lens shape and painting them black, I have a "dummy" camera. The dummy is then placed in a location some distance from the chosen site and over a period of anywhere from a day to a week to a month, it is moved closer and closer to it's final resting place. It is *very* important that each time you move the camera position that you step back and watch from a distance to make sure that the animal accepts the new positioning before you leave the area. Otherwise you may come back to find your subject has departed or died. If a new position stresses your subject, move the dummy back to the previous spot and try again later. You will not be able to get relaxed wildlife photographs if the subject is uncomfortable and worried.

Once you have moved your camera into position it's time to set up for the photographs you've so patiently prepared for. Choose an exposure that will work for the time the animal will most likely visit the site. Add fill flash if you think it's needed. If you are hand triggering the remote, place your blind as far away as possible and use binoculars to watch your subject. Try to remain patient and calm at all times anticipating the "decisive moment" and shooting a second or two before it occurs. Be aware that the sound of your camera firing may surprise your subject. Take a shot or two but then let the animal return without firing the camera. (This is really hard to do!) It will take a lot of practice but once you get your film back it's a treasure hunt. Each image provides insight into what you might do next time to get a better shot.

*This is the hard wire remote set up I used for photographing kestrels feeding their young at a nesting box at Amoco Oil's Yorktown, Virginia refinery.*

Remote camera work is an art. You have to go through many steps and procedures and consider a lot of variables to finally come up with a photograph that is great. □

Recipes

By Joan Cone

# Wood Ducks Are Always A Treat

MENU

*Mushroom Barley Soup*
*Apple Glazed Wood Duck*
*Almost No-Fat Refried Beans*
*Broccoli And Avocado Salad*
*Banana Pumpkin Pie*

**Mushroom Barley Soup**

½ pound mushrooms, sliced
½ cup chopped onion
⅓ cup margarine or butter
⅓ cup flour
3 cups chicken broth or bouillon
2 cups milk
½ cup quick pearled barley
1 tablespoon cream sherry (optional)
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon salt (optional)
3 tablespoons chopped parsley
⅛ teaspoon pepper

In a large saucepan, sauté mushrooms and onion in margarine. With slotted spoon, remove mushrooms and onion; reserve. Stir flour into drippings; continue cooking over medium heat until flour is browned, stirring constantly. Gradually add water and milk. Add remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil and reduce heat. Cover and simmer 10 to 12 minutes or until barley is tender, stirring occasionally. Additional water or milk may be added if soup becomes too thick upon standing. Makes six 1 cup servings.

**Apple Glazed Wood Duck**

2 wood ducks, skin on, split down back
1 large red cooking apple, cored and cut into quarters
2 tablespoons flour
1 cup chicken broth or bouillon

**Apple Glaze**

½ cup apple jelly
2 tablespoons apple juice

Preheat oven to 375°. Place 2 quarters of apple in each duck. Tie ducks together with string to keep apple in carcass. With a sharp fork prick the ducks' skin. Shake flour in a Reynolds Oven Bag, 10 x 16-inches, and place in a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan. Add chicken broth to bag and blend with flour using a wooden spoon. Place ducks in bag, skin side up. Close bag with nylon tie and make 6 half-inch slits in top. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes. Meanwhile, in a 1-quart saucepan, combine glaze ingredients and heat until jelly is melted. Remove ducks from oven and split bag down middle. Brush ducks with glaze and bake 10 to 15 minutes at 425°, basting frequently with remaining glaze until meat is desired doneness.

*Note:* For a sweeter gravy, add some of the glaze to the gravy after removing it from the bag. Cut ducks in half for serving. Allow 1 small or ½ duck per person.

***Almost No-Fat Refried Beans**
(For pressure cooker)

1 ½ cup pinto beans, soaked overnight
2 garlic cloves, peeled
1 small onion, halved
4 cups water
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons sour cream or light sour cream, if desired
1 teaspoon chili powder, or more to taste
½ teaspoon ground cumin
Salt and cayenne

Put the drained beans, garlic and onion in the pressure cooker and add 4 cups water. Cover and bring up to high pressure. Reduce heat to stabilize pressure and cook 10 minutes. Release pressure by running cold water over the cover. Drain well. Mash contents of cooker with a potato masher. Add the vinegar, sour cream, chili powder and cumin and blend well. Season with salt and cayenne to taste. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

**Broccoli and Avocado Salad**

1 ½ pounds young tender broccoli
1 avocado
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
½ cup pecans, coarsely chopped
1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

Cut the broccoli florets from the large stems, reserving the stems for another use. Fill a saucepan with salted water and bring to a boil. Add the florets and boil until barely tender, about 3 minutes. Drain, cool under cold, running water and drain again. Set aside. Peel and pit the avocado and cut it into cubes. Place in a small bowl and toss with 1 tablespoon of the lemon juice to prevent darkening. Place the avocado and broccoli in a salad bowl and add the nuts. In a small bowl, stir together the remaining lemon juice, mustard and salt to taste until well mixed. Add the oil and parsley, stirring vigorously until blended. Pour the dressing over the salad, toss gently and serve. Makes 4 servings.

**Banana Pumpkin Pie**

1 (9 ounce) ready-made graham cracker pie crust
2 medium, ripe bananas, mashed
1 cup canned pumpkin
1 can (12 ounces) evaporated skimmed milk
1 egg
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

Preheat oven to 400°. Place pie crust on center of baking sheet; set aside. Combine bananas, pumpkin, milk, egg, sugar and spice in large bowl, stir until well blended. Pour into pie crust. Bake at 400° for 15 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°, and bake 40 to 45 minutes more or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Cool completely on wire rack. Serve at room temperature or chilled. Makes 8 servings. □

*This recipe is from *The Best Pressure Cooker Cookbook Ever*, by Pat Dailey, published by HarperCollins, 1994.

To enjoy Joan Cone's game cooking course on the Internet, use the following code.
http://www.wmbg.com/mindstore/cook

# Virginia Wildl

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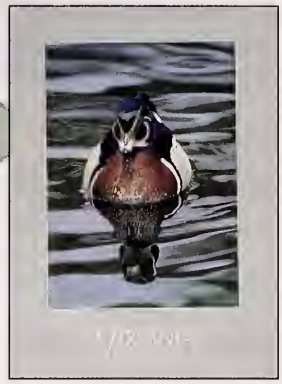

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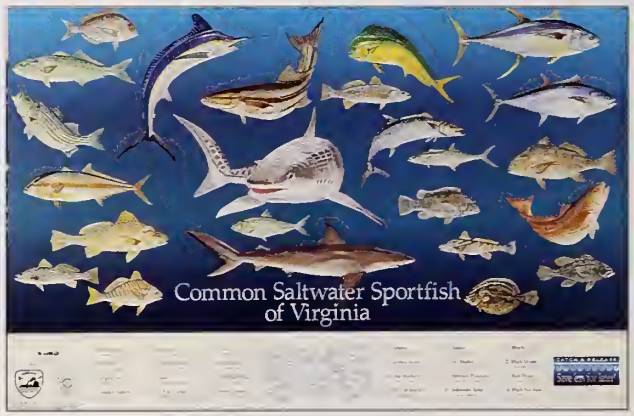


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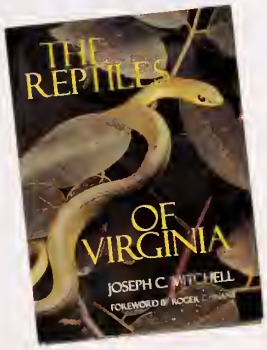


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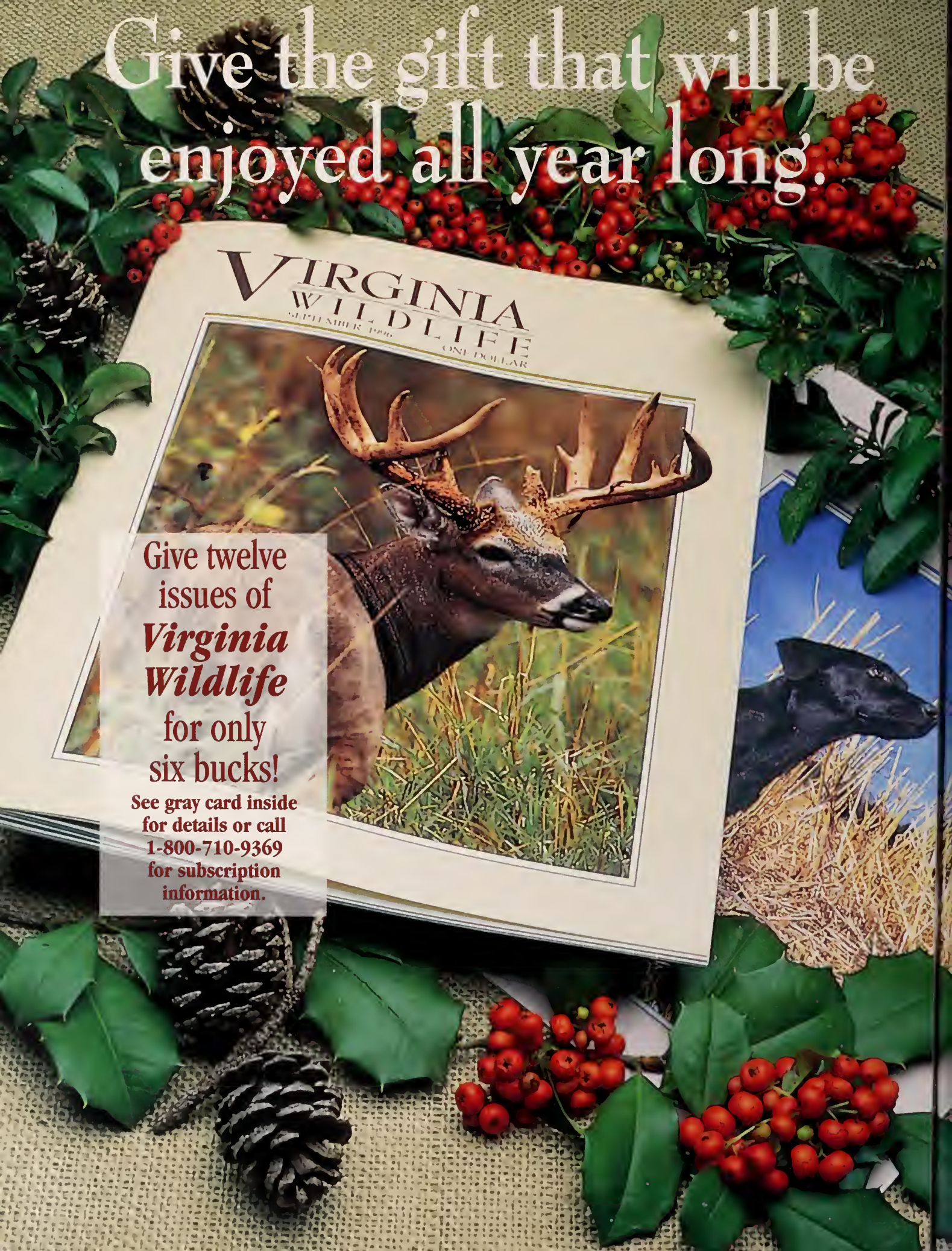


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